

ON THE FUTURE OF MUSIC HISTORY IN PROFESSIONAL AND CENTRAL-PERIPHERAL EUROPEAN MUSICAL CIRCUMSTANCES*

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ABSTRACT

In considering the chosen topic, I proceed from the complex relationship between music history, music historiography and musicology, focusing on musicology as an interdisciplinary branch of music history. I consider the issue of its future from two viewpoints: 1) from the viewpoint of the future which we can control through professional means, striving for a certain professional vision and the highest professional criteria, and 2) of the future we cannot influence through the profession itself. This aspect of the future is a problem of peripheral musicologies, because these are axiologically dependent on the centre's relationships towards the *Other* and scepticism regarding its evaluation.

KEYWORDS: music history, music historiography, musicology, centre, periphery

On this occasion I would like to consider the issue I have chosen as my direction of pondering the future of our scientific discipline, from two angles: from the angle of the discipline itself – pointing to the aspects of its future which we can influence by professional means, and from the social angle – pointing to the aspects which we cannot influence in that way but can only try to, by some other means, first of all the social, that is, those which are beyond our discipline.

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Reflection on the future of music history – as is the case with the future of any other phenomena – implies an orientation towards the meaning and sense of that phenomenon in the present; of course, provided that the way towards the future is considered as a process in which the past bequeaths to the present its living matter that will in some form outlive this present, and become the past from the point of view of some future present. If, from that viewpoint, we were to comprehend the *lack of a great narrative*, being supplanted by the *co-existence* of divergent *small narratives* about music as an identifiable feature of the present in the sphere of musical research, the *history of music* would necessarily appear as a multidimensional, hybrid discipline with different perspectives of the development and survival of the components of that multidimensionality; and thereby, to some extent, the inadequacy of its very name.

In this respect, the most stable are those components of the phenomenon of the *history of music* which have outlasted the past, and the most questionable are those that feature the current moments of research approaches to music. Hence, the term *history of music* is most enduring in its elementary, oldest meaning, something which we often forget, and which ultimately has a phenomenal basis. Namely, this applies to all occurrences of music itself, generally of *sound as music*, given that music already has its history as an aesthetic phenomenon,² regardless of the extent to which this history is – and whether at all – discovered and scientifically investigated.³

Then, the term *history of music* also signifies a science that provides a knowledge of the history of *sound as music*. That is why the syntagm *history of music* is a blanket term for various methods, branches and (sub)disciplines of musical research: for the *historiography of music* – that is, for the aspects of representing mostly the historical sequence of musical occurrences, as well as dealing with composers' biographies, and all that based on scientifically explored, systematized and processed factual materials;⁴ for research procedures that are close to historiography, and which Adler in his text "Umfang, Methode und Ziel der Musikwissenschaft" (Adler 1885) defines as *historical musicology*; then, for the analytical-theoretical approaches to music, which Adler would place in the focus of *systemic musicology* (Ibid.); and then, quite generally and undifferentiated, for contemporary musical examination (in the sense of the *history of contemporary music*). This examination is characterized by interdisciplinarity as the basis of the contextual interpretation of music, which is the main point of critical

2 For a more extensive elaboration of this issue, see Treitler 2001: 356–377.

3 In that sense, the *history of music* exists in a way in which the laws of nature existed and acted before we became aware of them, that is, before they were discovered.

4 As historiography has changed its focus in different historical, philosophical and cultural conditions, it has its own history that reflects these conditions by representing various problem-research orientations such as, for example: in the eighteenth century, the chronological classification and periodization of musical styles; in the nineteenth, issues of national identities; or in the twentieth – besides the above-mentioned orientations, also an intensified tendency towards the more comprehensive writing of historical surveys of music, such as the *Oxford History of Music* or the *New Grove Dictionary of Music*. For more about this, see Beard and Glog 2005: 61–63.

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musicology as the prevailing postmodern practice of scientifically dealing with this art. By the nature of things, those methods, branches and disciplines whose profiles and practices have been steadily developed and affirmed, seem to have the most prospects for the undisturbed preservation of their own identity in some future times. However, interpretive practices can easily reach the point where disciplinary specificity might be lost.

But since Adler's official foundation of the science of music, and his essentially still relevant classification of it, the term *history of music* – although it has remained in use in all of the above given meanings – has become too narrow and inadequate to signify the particular musicological ramifications that have appeared during the development of musicology after Adler, both within historical and systemic musicology, and also where they permeate each other, too. In particular, that term has become inadequate for signifying critical musicology, and branches such as cognitive musicology, psycho musicology, neuro musicology, zoo musicology, and many others, which have evolved in the tracks of criticism, more specifically, from issues that dominate the interpretive interest of musicologists in terms of themes and problem circles, and their results. Those interpretations can have a broad span whose interdisciplinarity might easily shift into transdisciplinarity. And that would mean the annulment of the “spherical model” of disciplines (Welsch 2010: 39–65), which still functions in interdisciplinarity, despite its transdisciplinary symptoms (Veselinović-Hofman 2016: 92–99). In other words, it would mean the removal of disciplinary competencies through optional combinations of established disciplinary methods and procedures, more precisely, treating them as irrelevant. And in this manner of neutralizing disciplinary identities, the very object of interpretation would also be neglected. Because, in a transdisciplinary treatment it does not act primarily as the object of analysis and examination but as the starting point, as an incentive for imaginative representations, descriptions, free associations and observations, which *pass through* disciplines, in fact surpass them, without lingering in any of them. And caught in such an interpretive net, the music as an object with the characteristic traits of its various appearances might be completely suppressed. The transdisciplinary focus is not on music and its theoretical interpretation in which some musical phenomenon will figure as a recognizable object, but on reflections that can be evoked by any of the object's elements (even extra-musical) and subsequently guided by a transversal path (Veselinović-Hofman 2016). Thus, in practically an unlimited associational efflorescence, in which the object moves away from itself, it ceases to be relevant as the real object of interpretation; it becomes merely a *reason for* the interpretation.

But although an existential crisis is lurking around musicology from the direction of transdisciplinary practice, since it neglects both the competencies of this science, and the ontology and authority of the world of music as the science's object, in principle and from a personal poetic attitude I still advocate the risky paths of critical musicological trends (Veselinović-Hofman 1998; 2005; 2007). With the awareness that between interdisciplinarity and transdisciplinarity, as the agency of the latter, there exists hyperinterpretation. It is crucially initiated by the transversal mind, so that transdisciplinarity is actually its fulfilment. I here refer to the phenomenon close to

that which Umberto Eco explains as “overinterpretation”: as a kind of interpretation in which “the rights of the interpreters have been overstressed” (Eco 1992a: 23), whereby the fact has been ignored that besides “the intention of the interpreter” and “of the author” of the text to be interpreted, there also is “the *intention of the text*” (Ibid: 25). With this observation Eco ultimately introduces the *reader* into the process of interpretation, whereby he considers “the intention of the text” as the result of the *reader’s speculations about* the intention of the text. To unravel this intention, the reader must become immersed in the text and draw conclusions about everything the text could be saying. He arrives at these conclusions on account of the coherence of the text, the consistency of its signification system and, of course, his personal interpretational expectations and understanding.⁵ If the system’s consistency is missing, the interpretation is on the way to becoming a goal in itself, and ignoring the “semantic isotope” relevant for the text in question (Eco 1992b: 62). In other words, when we exceed the boundaries of a reasonable interpretation in which its object must be recognized, “we simply risk facing a linguistic paradox”. (Eco 1992a: 41)

And yet – as I emphasized four years ago when I raised this question about musicology and transdisciplinarity⁶ – the problem of the disciplinary crisis of musicology does not occur when the transversal method is applied to music by authors who are not musicologists, but by those who *are* musicologists. The reason is that those who are not, have no responsibility at all towards the competencies of musicology, and, besides, their reflections on music might be very inventive and original; in any case, they can be enriching for the reception of music. The crisis is however incited by authors who are professionals in musicology, but resort to relativization and disregard of the profession’s standards, and thereby also to the conscious undermining of the profession’s integrity.⁷

But regardless of the extent to which an interdisciplinary musicological interpretation is ramified – including even what I would call the *symptom of passing contexts*, that

5 “Thus it is possible to speak of the text’s intention only as the result of a conjecture on the part of the reader. The initiative of the reader basically consists in making a conjecture about the text’s intention.” (Eco 1992b: 64)

6 It concerns my contribution to an international debate on the crisis in the humanities, within the conference “Beyond the Crisis in the Humanities: Transdisciplinary Transformations of Contemporary Discourses on Art and Culture”, held in Belgrade, on 24 and 25 April 2015, at the Faculty for Media and Communication of the University Singidunum. A book based on this conference was published a year later. (Veselinović-Hofman 2016)

7 On this occasion, I will not go into the reasons for such an attitude, which, otherwise, may originate not only from the general attitude of a musicologist towards the necessary and sufficient integrity of his own profession, but also from his psychological and ethical attributes, or, perhaps in the first place, from social benefits in the sense of the fulfillment of criteria that enable faster and easier personal penetration into the global market of discourses on art. The transdisciplinary method in particular is much “quicker”, in terms of marketing and socially much more agile and pervasive than the interdisciplinary method which still implies delving deeply into disciplines and not traversing them.

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is, contexts that in an interdisciplinary discourse are only indicated, through which the thought just passes without any development and argumentation – it will remain musicological as long as by professional methods and the means of musicology, and together with music as its object, it is maintained as recognizable and authoritative in the “brilliant flash of idiosyncratic writing” (Treitler 2001: 357–358).

Actually, what I am referring to is the future of musicology, which we can keep under control; which we can influence in one or another direction. And, it certainly concerns the future in which we can enrich musicology with new views, visions, new interdisciplinary connections and still untested pathways of research, without jeopardizing it as a profiled scientific area, in any sense.

In the main, Serbian contemporary musicology implements such a strategy; our academic practice in the field of musicology is deliberately and zealously attached to that goal, and the results achieved so far, for the most part fulfil the highest criteria that our state bureaucracy prescribes in accordance with the requirements of the respective system that, in not-so-mutually-different local variants, functions on a global scientific ground.

That system of the bureaucratic implementation of a specific canon is metaphorically called by Kevin Korsyn the *Ministry of Truth* (Korsyn 2003: 25)⁸ paraphrasing

8 The *Ministry of Truth* is one of two occurrences that Korsyn considers as the main causes of the crisis in the field of musical research, more precisely, of contemporary musicology, which, from the angle of its academic discourse in the USA, he specifies as the historical. Otherwise, to mark academic musical investigations on a global level, Korsyn uses terms such as “musical research” or “musical scholarship”. (Korsyn 2003: 192, fn. 11)

To designate the other cause of the crisis, Korsyn applies, also metaphorically, the syntagm of the *Tower of Babel*. By means of this formulation he points to the differences of thoughts, methods, procedures, languages and discourses among musicological practices and policies, more precisely, to their “fractionalization”; in fact, primarily to “rhetorical violence among factions” (Ibid: 176). Thereby, he does not consider the crisis is in the very existence of different discourses, but in the lack of communication which he notices among them, in both their mechanical and their oppressive co-existence. Therefore, as a way to overcome this situation he proposes, on the one hand, reliance on the logic of the *Möbius Strip* as the criterion of a desirable research view of the relating of disciplines, at which their boundaries disappear through the seamless transition of one discipline into another. He exemplifies that by the relationship between the history of music and the theory of music, as opposite members of the binary hierarchy, and thus in the way they are positioned in the light of the standpoints of Josef Kerman (Kerman 1985) and Kofi Agawu (Agawu 1993). By means of a deconstructive procedure Korsyn has demonstrated that these disciplines are mutually determining, in the sense that “theory becomes history becomes theory becomes history in a never-ending cycle, as each impulse turns into its opposite without ever reaching a synthesis or coming to rest”. (Korsyn 2003: 89)

On the other hand, in close connection with the previously said, and relying on Chantal Mouffe and her explication of the difference between antagonism and agonism, Korsyn infers that we ought to strive for the building of such a musical-research community that shall ethically rely on tolerance and agonism: on opposed relationships, which would work on the constructing of their “shared symbolic space in which differences would be nonoppressive”. (Ibid: 177)

George Orwell from his book *1984*. As the crisis point of this system, he singles out the kind of professionalization in which “the bureaucratic treadmill manufactures individuality – or a type of individuality – even as it produces conformity” (Korsyn 2003: 26).⁹

As we know, scientists’ obligation in university practice – and not only there! – is to fulfil bureaucratic requirements that aim at influencing professionalization, first of all in the sense of the unification of criteria on the evaluation scale of the quantity and quality of scientific work. Evaluation tables, the index of quotation, the “cult of the abstract” and “its circulation” in the role of information, reports and various reviews, “whereby knowledge is summarized, paraphrased (...) so that it can assume a portable form in the competition for cultural capital, becoming a kind of currency” (Korsyn 2003: 24), and then, research categories as the mark of the scientist’s rating, but also educational compression and acceleration in an endeavour to enable students to venture into the musicological market as early as possible, function as the basic forms and demands of a practice, whereby the *Ministry of Truth* regulates the way to relevance in scientific research, based on which it classifies achievements, evaluates them and financially supports them as commodities (Cf. Korsyn 2003: 21–27).

All musicologically relevant institutions are bound in a network to the above described system, but, in addition, within this network, they themselves perform various estimations and selections according to their own, individual programme orientations and criteria, whereby they significantly regulate discourses on music.¹⁰ And in the end, administration is nevertheless the one that by its own excellence confirms the excellence in everything: teaching, research projects, the ranking of teachers, universities, students... (Cf. Korsyn 2003: 21).

But, at the same time, bearing in mind Foucault’s “radical shift from conceiving power in negative, repressive terms to seeing it as productive”, Korsyn emphasises that “[w]hen the status quo demands constant change, however – when the system itself demands relentless progress and innovation – change and constancy can trade places, turning into each other” (Korsyn 2003: 26).

From that angle it can hardly be denied that the power of market logic and competition, which are now dominant in the field of musical research – and in whose mechanism quantity can seriously endanger quality! – have had a significant effect in intensifying *our* musicological production, on aspects of musicological activity in Serbia, and also on their visibility on the domestic and foreign musicological market.

And yet, we must ask ourselves what the current degree of visibility achieved so far in the domestic and global system of the *Ministry of Truth* essentially means

9 That is why taking into account Michel Foucault on this subject, Korsyn would say that “[t]he new forms of power colonize individuals from within, so that they submit willingly and spontaneously”. (Ibid: 27)

10 For example, according to these criteria, institutions sponsor awards; journals; projects; reward students; support peer reviewed investigations; organize conferences and select conference submissions. (Cf. Korsyn 2003: 21–22)

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for our musicology in the future. I find that this needs to be answered realistically by saying that it is about a future that will not be much different from the present, since in this respect it concerns a future that we cannot influence through the profession itself, contrary to the future of musicology as an interdisciplinary science and a science turning towards transdisciplinarity, whose future, as stressed above, can be shaped within the framework and means of the discipline itself. In other words, the future of the real visibility and presence of our musicology as the living matter of the present at the global level, is no longer solely a professional issue. Although the “archive” of the *Ministry of Truth* clearly shows that Serbian musicology receives appropriate recognition for appropriate results – in the field of pedagogy,¹¹ the sphere of scientific work, and the engagement of individual musicologists in various international bodies – there are also clear indicators of the reality in which that measure of our presence, meaning, true respect on the world musicological stage depends, crucially, on the politics of the *centre*, that is, centres of influence and adjudication. In that framework, Serbian musicology belongs to the category of the *Other*, for which, granted, the centre advocates generally and declaratively, indeed with a great many practical steps, too. However, essentially, it seems as if the centre does not feel an authentic, true need also to take into account the research *results* of that *Other*, as potentially, equally relevant as its own. For example, I cannot find any convincing *professional* reason for a situation in which the musicology of the centre does not also feature – on an equal footing! – original and interesting musicological viewpoints and treatises on some issues, which come from the periphery, especially when they are chronologically even older than those which deal with the same issues, and originate from the musicology of the centre.

Let me give just a symptomatic example of this absence of the habit of taking the periphery into consideration. It is a “standard” example, which means that the number of its other appearances is not small. Thus: our two leading musicological institutions – the Department of Musicology of the Faculty of Music, University of Arts in Belgrade, and the Musicological Institute of the Serbian Academy of Sciences and Arts – regularly organize international scientific gatherings. Usually, quite a number of musicologists from all over the world, including the countries of the centre participate in them. The selected contributions are printed in their extended versions in the corresponding thematic collections, which are available to all the authors of the texts, and all the participants in the gatherings. However, one is left with the impression that the majority of participants who belong to the central musicological regions do not read the papers from the periphery. For instance, some of these participants failed to notice the papers by their colleagues from the periphery, when, in some of their further investigations, they dealt with issues akin to those from the conferences’ topic areas, otherwise issues about which our authors had expressed very grounded theoretical views, proposals for new research directions and new evidence. In this

¹¹ Here, I shall mention only the twice-accepted project proposals (in 2014 and 2017!) with which the Department of Musicology of the Faculty of Music in Belgrade has become a participant of the Erasmus+ Programme: Higher Education, Jean Monnet Module.

regard, I am not at all saying that somebody should have commented on those works (under the assumption that somebody had read them in the available collections of papers). I am merely saying that those papers from the periphery, should also have been *indicated as existing* in the corresponding bibliographies, in addition to those that originated from the centre.

Ultimately, in this case, it appears that the true state of affairs concerning the *Other* is characteristically revealed. And that in such a constellation even the highest achievements of the *Other* can be *a priori* treated with scepticism, regardless, even, of the *Other's* high position as approved by the *Ministry of Truth*. However, this is not a case of a situation that *can* be improved by musicologists themselves, because, as already stressed, it is not only a musicological issue but an issue of the entire cultural and socio-economic authority of the state that stands behind musicology (or any other profession), of the maturity of its political mind, and the standards of its action.

Hence, not every *Otherness* is equally positioned towards the centre, and not every peripheral musicology has an equal meaning, sense and value from the viewpoint of the centre. From this aspect, our musicology is not only a “proven” *Other*, but *marginally Other*.¹² And it will remain in such a position until it is supported by the state's appropriate reputation and the strength of its cultural, economic and political “passport”. Because, ultimately, it is precisely this “passport” which makes or does not make us marginal. Today and in the future.

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12 It should here be emphasized that the relationship between the centre and the periphery / margins has essentially been changed in the space of the internet, since it relies on a different, in principal, extra-political basis. For more on this issue, see (Veselinović-Hofman 2012: 23–33).

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МИРЈАНА ВЕСЕЛИНОВИЋ-ХОФМАН

О БУДУЋНОСТИ ИСТОРИЈЕ МУЗИКЕ У ПРОФЕСИОНАЛНОМ И ЦЕНТРАЛНО-
ПЕРИФЕРНОМ ЕВРОПСКОМ МУЗИЧКОМ ОКРУЖЕЊУ

(РЕЗИМЕ)

Тема коју сам обрадила у овом раду односи се на два важна, а међусобно неодојива, чврсто проткана проблема, са којима се нужно суочавамо када поставимо питање о будућности историје музике. Реч је о одређењу према самом појму историје музике, томе шта историја музике за нас заправо значи и, у односу на то, о одређењу према значењу и смислу њене будућности.

Стога сам при разматрању одабране теме пошла од комплексног односа између историје музике, историографије музике и музикологије, схватајући термин *историја музике* у тројаком смислу. Као општи, за све појаве и догађаје из саме музичке прошлости али, једним делом, истовремено и као синоним за историографију музике и музикологију; дакле – у одређеној сагласности са тумачењем Леа Трајтлера – и као знање о тој прошлости. Односно, као

термин којим се обухватају дискурси о разним појавама и догађајима из музичке стварности једног геополитичког и културног амбијента, а на темељу научно истраженог, систематизованог и обрађеног чињеничног материјала. То знање о прошлости продукује се разним методама, међу којима је кључна музиколошка. Музикологија је тако овде схваћена као интерпретативно-контекстуална „производња” знања о *ијом* знању у оквиру историје музике, а са ослоном у анализи саме музичке супстанце.

Усредсређујући се у овом раду управо на музикологију као интерпретативну, интердисциплинарну грану историје музике, размотрила сам питање њене будућности, с једне стране, с обзиром на трансдисциплинарност као кризну тачку развоја музиколошке интердисциплинарности и, са друге стране, с обзиром на дихотомну природу западноевропског вредносног система, у којем однос између централног и периферног још увек функционише као један од темељних вредносних оријентира. Другим речима, имам у виду будућност коју можемо да контролишемо обликујући је у складу са одређеном професионалном визијом и највишим професионалним стандардима, али и будућност на коју не можемо да утичемо професионалним средствима, у којој чак и ти највиши домети вредносно подлежу односу према *грујом* и скепси при његовом уважавању.

Питање шта у таквим околностима српска музикологија (као „осведочени” *груји!*) данас чини и шта би још могла/требало да учини, било је покретачки мотив за настајање овог написа, а покушај одговора на то питање – његов жељени циљ.

Кључне речи: историја музике, историографија музике, музикологија, центар, периферија